

Superintendent Rick Schmitt's Monthly Update

June 2015

Superintendent Schmitt regularly updates the greater San Dieguito Union High School District community through our local media with a monthly update. Topics will include curriculum, assessment, facilities, budget, enrollment, safety, and other specific and special interest topics. Today's topics include 2016-17 bell schedule ideas and increased program options at LCCHS and TPHS, along with an update on AP testing and our new state exams.

2016-17 Bell Schedule Ideas & Program Options at La Costa Canyon (LCCHS) and Torrey Pines High School (TPHS)

Staff from TPHS, LCCHS, and the District recently have been investigating various bell schedule options for implementation during the 2016-17 school year. A tentative schedule has been developed that will allow students to take more than six classes while not extending the school day, thus allowing students at the two schools more opportunities to engage in a broader course of study similar to the Canyon Crest and San Dieguito HS Academies. During the fall of the 2015-16 school year, both TPHS and LCCHS will evaluate various instructional minute options to determine which option best fits each school's needs, while promoting schedule flexibility and choice for our students and families.

With the opportunity for students at LCC and TPHS to take more than six classes beginning with the 2016-17 academic year, district and site staff are also exploring a variety of potential new academic and elective program options at each school for the 2016-17 school year. The goal of this exploration is to identify programs that would be attractive to students. No decisions have been made about any particular programs, but areas of initial interest include Engineering, Biomedicine, or other Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics (STEM) pathways, Project-Based Learning, and the International Baccalaureate program.

STEM pathways are sequences of courses designed to develop skill and expertise in a particular STEM-related field such as Engineering. Course sequences typically move from introductory to advanced and culminate with some real world experience such as an internship in the workplace.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional model in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex, typically multi-disciplinary, question, problem, or challenge. Key features of PBL include critical thinking and problem-solving, and research skills applied to a real world problem or challenge. Students typically work in small teams over extended periods of time to research the challenge and develop, critique, and revise solutions with the product ultimately presented to experts outside of the school setting. This program simulates college and workplace lab environments.

International Baccalaureate (IB) is a rigorous internationally-respected curriculum and diploma program that is used in schools around the world. The program outlines a prescribed curriculum and includes external assessments via which students can earn college credit for a wide variety of courses. Through the IB program, students can choose to pursue an IB diploma in addition to their high school diploma by completing a sequence of courses and passing a variety of embedded assessments, or students can simply take IB classes of interest to them without pursuing the IB diploma.

In the fall of 2015, staff, students and families will be engaged in discussion of various program options as part of the decision-making process around program offerings. Final decisions about bell schedule and program changes at LCCHS and TPHS will be made with ample time for our families to make thoughtful and informed choices in regards to selecting a high school for the 2016-17 school year.

Advanced Placement (AP) & New State Exams

During the months of April and May we were busy administering AP exams to our high school students and the new statewide Smarter Balanced Assessments Consortium (SBAC) tests in English Language Arts and mathematics to our students in grades 7, 8, and 11. This year SDUHSD administered an astounding 7,412 AP Exams to students, a test increase of over 225 from the previous year and a new SDUHSD record for participation. Since 2004, as we have expanded access to Honors & AP courses, the total number of students taking AP exams has doubled while the pass rate has improved from 62% to 83%.

The new SBAC tests were conducted over the course of the last two months at all of our schools and we are proud that our very high participation rate significantly exceeds the California Department of Education requirement for accountability purposes. This year, the results will be used as a baseline for students, schools, and districts, with new score reports forthcoming during the summer. The new SBAC tests are very similar to what AP tests have always been, with a focus on critical thinking and problem solving. The new state standards and related tests are aligned to the new SAT and ACT exams.

We are so proud of our students—another fabulous year! Compliments also go out to our active, informed and involved parent community. We are listening to you. Over the course of the year, I enjoyed over twenty parent information sessions at each of our schools and was also able to visit each elementary district for sessions with K-6 parents. I always enjoy hearing from parents during these informal Q&A sessions. I will be scheduling parent session at each of our schools again in 2015-16.

Have a safe, restful and enjoyable summer. First day of school is August 25, 2015!!!

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